

## **STRATEGIES TO REDUCE TEXTBOOK COSTS TO PROMOTE ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS**

**6.2**

### ***INFORMATION AND REPORTS***

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### **Issue**

As part of the System Strategic Plan implementation the system has been looking at access and affordability both from the aspect of increasing the availability and the awareness of financial aid, and from that of reducing costs. There is consensus that textbooks have become a prohibitive cost for community college students, preventing access and hampering student success. The System Office convened a series of Textbook Summits, which have served as an action planning group to investigate the reasons for escalating textbook costs and what solutions are available and feasible in the community college context. The Community College Committee of the California Association of College Stores (CACS), the Student Public Interest Research Groups (PIRG), the CCC Student Senate, the CCC Academic Senate, the California State University, publishers, advocates for persons with disabilities, innovators in utilizing electronic alternatives to traditional textbooks and several other groups have already done significant work on this issue, helping to raise awareness of the problem and of its potential solutions. All of these groups participated in the Textbook Summits.

### **Background**

According to several recent studies by the Student Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) and the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), students nationally now spend an average of \$900 per year on textbooks -- or about half the average cost of tuition at 2-year colleges nationwide and 150 percent of the cost of community college enrollment fees in California. These same studies report that textbook costs have been increasing at four times the rate of inflation<sup>1</sup>. These reports, as well findings of the federal Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, examine the reasons for escalating textbook costs. They liken the textbook market to that of the pharmaceutical industry where those who “prescribe” the product are different than those who pay for it, and point to several problems that give publishers control over the market.

Lawmakers in California and nationally have also become increasingly concerned about this issue. Last year's legislative session saw the introduction of three bills related to textbook affordability; Assembly Bill (AB) 1548 (Solario) that was supported by the textbook publishers and signed by the Governor, Senate Bill (SB) 831 (Corbett) that was favored by the student advocates but vetoed, and AB 577 (Ruskin) that would support the expansion of "open educational resources" as textbook alternatives. AB 577 is a two-year bill and the Board has signaled its support. At least 33 other states have introduced and in some cases passed legislation related to textbooks. At the federal level, the proposed Higher Education Reauthorization Act includes an amendment related to textbook price transparency.

The System Office joined with the Community College Committee of the California Association of College Stores to launch a concerted systemwide effort to address textbook affordability by bringing together all of the interested and affected parties in a Textbook Summit. This action planning committee includes representatives of the Academic Senate Textbook Affordability Task Force, the Student Senate, chief executive officers, chief instructional, business and student services officers, bookstore managers, librarians, publishers, used textbook retailers, representatives of the California State University (CSU) Digital Marketplace in which the CCCs are a partner and student access advocacy organizations. The November 2007 Summit generated interest throughout California and 65 people attended the initial summit at Chabot College, including 28 invited committee members. A second meeting at De Anza College in February 2008 was also well attended. The Summit participants reviewed recent studies that have identified causes of escalating costs and potential solutions. The committee also heard presentations from the major stakeholders including students, faculty, bookstore managers, publishers and proponents of various open source, commercial and hybrid digital and technology based solutions. Three subcommittees were established to explore some of the more promising strategies.

The second summit meeting was focused on evaluating the value and feasibility of implementing potential solutions in the California Community Colleges. Based on advice presented during the first summit, the committee evaluated strategies on three criteria: the potential amount of student savings, the potential to improve student learning, and the timeframe for and feasibility of implementation. The potential solutions considered by the committee include:

- Systemwide volume discounts on customized textbooks including custom cover and/or custom content editions and customized bundles
- College or district textbook adoption policies
- Textbook rental programs
- Free and low-cost open source digital textbooks and learning resources
- CCC participation in the CSU Digital Market Place
- Print-on-demand publishing
- Legislation to lower textbook costs
- Amendments to problematic textbook requirements in the curriculum approval, transfer and articulation processes
- Education and awareness campaign for CCC stake-holders on textbook cost reduction strategies

- Expansion of library reserves
- Elimination of State sales tax on textbooks

The Preliminary Analysis of Textbook Cost Reduction Strategies Matrix (Appendix A) includes for each strategy a description of the potential benefits, obstacles and/or required elements, parties primarily responsible for implementation, and a preliminary analysis of the potential solution on its ability to meet the three criteria mentioned above. In general solutions tended to fall into categories that were short-term and were able to be implemented fairly easily, but may be of limited usefulness in the future, and longer term solutions that have a great deal of potential to both reduce student costs and improve learning, but that are currently available only in a limited capacity.

Summaries of the discussion at the November 2007 and February 2008 Textbook Summit meetings are contained in *Appendix B*. A video recording of the first textbook summit is available thanks to Chabot College and 3C Media Solutions. It can be viewed, along with Power point presentations from the meetings, at the following link:

<http://www.3cm mediasolutions.org/pages/programming/Archives/TextbookSummit2007.html>

## Conclusion

Recommendations from the Textbook Summit action planning group will be presented to the Board of Governors in May 2008 for statewide strategies to enhance textbook affordability.

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### <sup>i</sup> Reference List

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